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ABSTRACT

Noting that high school students are just learning to distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate behavior and that without healthy adult supervision, initiation rites may become hazing incidents, this study surveyed students' experiences with hazing and initiation activities. Participating in the survey were 1,541 students from a random national sample of 20,000 high school students, stratified by juniors and seniors. Ninety percent of the students attended public schools, with 5 percent attending church schools, 5 percent attending other private schools, and 1 percent being home schooled. Eighty-four percent reported average grades of A or B. The survey responses indicated that 91 percent of students belonged to at least one group. Nearly all had experienced positive activities as part of joining these groups. Forty-eight percent of students belonging to groups reported subjection to hazing, with 30 percent performing potentially illegal acts. Both males and females reported high levels of hazing. The lower the student's grade point average, the greater his or her risk of being hazed. Almost every type of high school group, even church groups, had significantly high levels of hazing. Seventy-one percent of hazed students reported negative consequences. Twenty-five percent of hazed students were first hazed before the age of 13. Dangerous hazing activities were as prevalent among high school students as among college athletes. Students did not distinguish "fun" and hazing. Based on findings, it was recommended that students be sent a clear anti-hazing message; that the culture be changed to invest in community, equality, and civility; and that adults learn to pay attention to teens who are excluded. (KB)

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Alfred University

INITIATION RITES IN AMERICAN HIGH SCHOOLS: A National Survey

FINAL REPORT

Nadine C. Hoover, Ph.D.
Principal Investigator

Norman J. Pollard, Ed.D.
Director of Counseling and Student Development

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Dr. John D. Cerio
Professor of School Psychology and Director of Child and Family Services

Dr. Edward Gaughan
Professor of Psychology and Chair of School Psychology

Dr. Arthur L. Greil
Professor of Sociology and Health Policy and Chair of Social Sciences

Dr. Robert A. Myers
Professor of Anthropology and Public Health

Dr. Norman J. Pollard
Director of Counseling and Student Development Center and Adjunct Associate Professor of School Psychology

We are especially grateful to all the high school students across the country who took the time to fill out the survey and return it to us and to their families for their support.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Joining groups is a basic human need. Forming a sense of identity and belonging is a major developmental task for teen-agers. Children of high school age, however, are just learning to distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate behavior. They need healthy adult supervision, role modeling, and guidance, without which initiation may easily go awry. When groups employ humiliation and danger to initiate new members into their groups, it becomes hazing. We found that 91 percent of high school students belong to at least one group. Nearly all of them (98%) experienced positive activities as part of joining these groups, and half of them experienced only positive activities. However, we also found:

Hazing is prevalent among American high school students.

- 48 percent of students who belong to groups reported being subjected to hazing activities.
- 43 percent reported being subjected to humiliating activities.
- 30 percent reported performing potentially illegal acts as part of their initiation.

All high school students who join groups are at risk of being hazed.

- Both female and male students report high levels of hazing, although male students are at highest risk, especially for dangerous hazing.
- The lower a student's grade point average the greater their risk of being hazed.
- Almost every type of high school group had significantly high levels of hazing.
- Even groups usually considered safe haze new members. For example, 24 percent of students involved in church groups were subjected to hazing activities.

Hazing hurts children, emotionally and physically.

- 71 percent of the students subjected to hazing reported negative consequences, such as getting into fights, being injured, fighting with parents, doing poorly in school, hurting other people, having difficulty eating, sleeping, or concentrating, or feeling angry, confused, embarrassed or guilty.

Hazing starts young, and continues through high school and college.

- 25 percent of those who reported being hazed were first hazed before the age of 13.
- Dangerous hazing activities are as prevalent among high school students (22%) as among college athletes (21%).
- Substance abuse in hazing is prevalent in high school (23%) and increases in college (51%).

Adults must share the responsibility when hazing occurs.

- Students were most likely to be hazed if they knew an adult who was hazed.
- 36 percent of the students said that they would not report hazing primarily because "There's no one to tell," or "Adults won't handle it right." (27%)

Students do not distinguish between "fun" and hazing.

- Only 14 percent said they were hazed, yet 48 percent said they participated in activities that are defined as hazing, and 29 percent said they did things that are potentially illegal in order to join a group.
- Most said they participated in humiliating, dangerous or potentially illegal activities as a part of joining a group because those activities are "fun and exciting."

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This report was written to share our findings with other institutions concerned about the welfare and safety of students throughout the United States. We want people to be aware of the prevalence and nature of this problem, and ways in which we may be able to prevent it. For more information go to: www.alfred.edu/news/html/hazing_study.html or contact: Susan C. Goetschius, Alfred University Director of Communications, One Saxon Drive, Alfred, N.Y. 14802-1205 607-871-2170 or e-mail: goetschius@alfred.edu

WHAT ARE INITIATION RITES?

A major developmental task for teen-agers is learning how to fit in and be accepted socially by their peers. It is also important for existing members of groups to initiate the new members. When initiation rites are done appropriately, they meet teen-agers' needs for a sense of belonging, and the group's needs for members to understand the history and culture of the group, and build relationships with others who belong. Initiation rites are comprised of pro-social behaviors that build social relationships, understanding, empathy, civility, altruism and moral decision-making. Ninety percent of all students responding to the survey belonged to high school groups.[1] Among them, 98 percent of the students – both girls and boys – responding to the survey reported involvement in at least one of community-building initiation activity. Half of the students (52%) reported being involved in <u>only</u> this type of initiation activities.

Percent of Students Participating in Community Building Initiations

Community Building Initiation	Male	Female	Total
Keep a specific grade point average	68%	75%	71%
Take a test for skill or knowledge, try-outs, auditions	68%	73%	71%
Go on a trip, camp, ropes course, or preseason practice	62%	64%	63%
Dress up formally for events	56%	67%	61%
Attend a banquet, picnic, lunch table, or food event	54%	66%	60%
Undertake group projects, fundraisers, or work camps	52%	63%	57%
Play recreational games together	47%	48%	47%
Take part in group singing, chanting or cheering	34%	57%	45%
Take an oath or sign a contract	34%	42%	38%
Be a mentor, Little/Big Sister or Brother, or buddy	26%	40%	33%
One or more community building initiation	**98%**	**98%**	**98%**

Students significantly more likely to be involved in <u>only</u> positive initiation rites and not hazing: were female, had a higher GPA than those who did participate in hazing, did not know an adult who was hazed or thought hazing was socially unacceptable. They were involved in sports, scholastic groups, music, art, or theater groups, or social organizations. Girls did more group singing (+23%), acted as mentors (+14%), and attended banquets (+12%) than boys.

Students seem to understand the importance of community-building activities to initiate new members. It was interesting to note that when students were asked in an open-ended question about what activities not listed on the survey form were expected of them to join a high school group, by a three-to-one margin they (n=415) responded with community-building activities, rather than humiliating or dangerous behaviors. Their answers fell into several categories:

- ***Hanging out together***: 36 percent. Specific activities included recreational times, interaction with peers, outdoor activities, dances, games, "music all day long," trips, meals, camps, bonfires, get-to-know-you games, and meetings.
- ***Community service***: 24 percent. They volunteer for political causes or charities, or participate in fund-raising walks or mission trips.

[1] Unless otherwise noted, student behaviors are based on 1,390 students involved in one or more high school groups from 1,541 total respondents.

- ***Being role models***: 16 percent. Among the answers were developing leadership skills, counseling/mentoring new members, tutoring others, showing self-discipline, "being a better person," signing a contract, upholding certain attitudes, writing a paper on "why I deserve membership," treating others as you wish to be treated, and representing the school.
- ***Performing***: 14 percent. Students said they were expected to win games, put on plays, march in parades, play in a band, perform for the community, do "step shows," adhere to dress codes or show school spirit.
- ***Spiritual activities***: 6 percent. Activities included prayer and Bible study.
- ***Education***: 3 percent. Activities included discussion groups, study groups, cultural activities, workshops, and meeting with people from other schools to learn how they do things.

Hazing was defined as "any humiliating or dangerous activity expected of you to join a group, regardless of your willingness to participate. Many people believe that humiliating others is just fun or "horsing around" and not a real problem, but we found that more than half of the high school students (56%) subjected to humiliation were also expected to engage in potentially illegal acts. We are aware that among college athletes, 81 percent of those who were subjected to humiliation were also expected to engage in potentially illegal acts (Alfred University, 1999). Because humiliation appears to be a clear warning flag that illegal hazing behaviors are involved or may develop, we maintained humiliation as one of the hazing categories defined as follows:

- ***Humiliation***: socially offensive, isolating, or uncooperative behaviors.
- ***Substance abuse***: abuse of tobacco, alcohol, or illegal drugs.
- ***Dangerous hazing:*** hurtful, aggressive, destructive, and disruptive behaviors.

Even though there is anecdotal evidence that suggests that sexual acts are definitely a part of high school hazing, we were required to guarantee the providers of student names and addresses that we would not ask direct questions about sexual activity. We were surveying high school juniors and seniors, who are generally between the ages of 16 and 18, and therefore considered to be minors. Accompanying each survey form was a cover letter with sufficient information to constitute informed consent, but a conservative position not to ask explicit questions about sexual behavior was considered prudent. This restriction limited our ability to determine the prevalence of sexual abuse compared to other behaviors.

High school students were not able to clearly distinguish between levels of severity in hazing. When asked to specify "other" humiliating and dangerous behaviors expected of them, under the category of "humiliating behaviors," they reported dangerous behaviors, such as: multiple sexual partners, performing oral sex on mentors, beating up others, inflicting pain on oneself, locking new members in lockers, and stealing. Therefore, student responses to "other" humiliating and dangerous behaviors were reported jointly (n=120):

- ***Singled out***: performed in front of others; were tormented, taunted, made fun of; were only allowed to associate with other members; were "ditched" in a public place; were not spoken to if they refused to do something; or were taught to boast. One student called this "mean attention."
- ***Physical humiliation***: were given "wedgies;" had to push a penny across the floor of the bus with one's nose; or were required to suck someone else's toes, consume a mixture of urine, spoiled milk, and eggs; or "spelled one's name with butt in public."
- ***Nudity***: skinny dipped, stripped, streaked, played truth or dare; were required to put "Icy Hot" on testicles; "had to shave balls (testicles), then walk around school with them hanging out."

- ***Sexual acts***: were expected to "allow leader to molest you;" forced to perform oral sex for mentor; were victims of a rape or gang rape, or were expected to participate in rape or a gang rape; or were forced to have sex with animals and/or with multiple sexual partners.
- ***Physical danger***: allowed seniors to hit you hard during practice; were locked in lockers; engaged in high speed car games; or jumped off a bridge.
- ***Boundary testing***: paint-balled moving vehicles; toilet-papered friends' houses; stayed out past curfew; disobeyed parents; stole; trespassed; or were kidnapped or kidnapped others in the middle of the night.

Percent of Students Subjected to Hazing Behaviors

Humiliation	**Male**	**Female**	**Total**
Be yelled, cursed, or sworn at	20%	14%	17%
Associate with specific people, not others	15%	16%	16%
Act as a personal servant to older members	14%	11%	12%
Undress or tell dirty stories or jokes	12%	10%	11%
Embarrass yourself publicly	10%	13%	11%
Be thrown into a pool, ocean, creek, pond, or toilet	12%	8%	10%
Skip school or refuse to do school work or chores	10%	10%	10%
Tattoo, pierce, or shave yourself or each other	11%	8%	9%
Eat or drink disgusting things	8%	9%	8%
Deprive yourself of food, sleep, or cleanliness	8%	7%	7%
One or more humiliating hazing activity	**48%**	**39%**	**43%**

Substance Abuse	**Male**	**Female**	**Total**
Drink alcohol	16%	11%	13%
Participate in drinking contests	13%	10%	12%
Smoke cigarettes or cigars, or use tobacco	12%	10%	11%
Use illegal drugs	12%	9%	11%
Drink or exercise until you pass out	11%	8%	9%
One or more substance abuse activity	**24%**	**18%**	**23%**

Dangerous Hazing	**Male**	**Female**	**Total**
Make prank phone calls or harass others	11%	9%	10%
Destroy or vandalize property	10%	8%	9%
Steal, cheat, or commit a crime	9%	7%	8%
Beat up others or pick a fight with someone	9%	5%	7%
Inflict pain on self, brand, participate in satanic rite	5%	6%	6%
Be tied up or exposed to extreme cold	7%	5%	6%
Be physically abused or beaten	8%	5%	6%
Be cruel to animals	4%	3%	3%
One or more dangerous hazing activity	**27%**	**17%**	**22%**

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How Many Students Are Hazed?

Half of the students (48%) reported being subjected to activities that are considered hazing. Based on this percent as the best estimate available, we project more than 1.5 million high school students in the United States are being subjected to some form of hazing each year.

Percent of Students Subjected to Various Types of Hazing

Initiation Rites—Inclusive	%
Hazing of Any Form	48
Humiliating Hazing	43
Potentially Illegal Hazing	29
Substance Abuse Hazing	23
Dangerous Hazing	22

Nearly all students who were hazed were subjected to humiliation (43% of the total). Distinguishing what is embarrassing to a teen-ager from what is humiliation targeted toward specific individuals is a task teen-agers struggle to learn. Of the students subjected to humiliating hazing, just under half (19%) were subjected to only humiliating behaviors, while just over half (24%) were also expected to engage in substance abuse or other dangerous acts.

When substance abuse and other dangerous behaviors are combined, nearly a third (29%) of all students were expected to engage in potentially illegal acts as part of an initiation. Twenty-one percent were expected to engage in ***substance abuse*** as a form of initiation. Seven percent were engaged in only substance abuse, but no other dangerous hazing, while 16% of all students were also engaged in other dangerous hazing activities. Twenty-two percent of all students were subjected to ***dangerous hazing*** beyond substance abuse.

In addition, 13 percent of the students reported that they did not join a group because they were afraid of being hazed (10%), left a group because of the hazing (7%) or both. Struggling to learn socially appropriate and constructive ways to bond and form social identities is a challenge for all high school students. Being ostracized and isolated makes being a teen-ager even more difficult.

Most high school students did not perceive even the most dangerous initiation activities as hazing. Only 15 percent of the students said that they thought they were hazed in high school, but twice that many reported abusing substances or committing dangerous acts as part of their initiation. Even though high school students' self-report of hazing is substantially lower than the actual behaviors reported, a total of 29 percent said they had been hazed (15%), witnessed hazing (18%), and/or left a group because of the hazing (7%).

Across the United States, the greatest number of high school students were subjected to hazing for sports (24%), peer groups or gangs (16%), music, art, or theater (8%), or church (7%). For all other types of groups, 5 percent or less of all students reported being hazed (estimated at <170,000 per group type). By far the greatest number of high school students were hazed for athletics. Sixty-seven percent of the high school students reported being involved in athletics, and 35 percent of them reported being subjected to some form of hazing; this constitutes 24 percent of all students or approximately 800,672 high school athletes per year.

Percent of Students Hazed to Join Specific Organizations

Group	%	Estimated #
Sports Team	24%	800,672
Peer Group or Gang	16%	558,767
Music, Art, Theater group	8%	286,198
Church Group	7%	235,091

To understand hazing by organization it is important to look at two factors: the number of students who join an organization, and the percent of students who are hazed to join that organization. For example, only 7 percent of the total population reported being hazed to join a church group yet, because a large number belong to a church group, that 7 percent represents 235,091 children. Although vocational groups, cheerleading squads, and fraternities all hazed a larger percent of new members than church groups, many more students were involved in church groups (29% of the total population) than the other groups (8%, 15%, and 6% respectively). That means that the number of students hazed to join a church group is greater than the number of students hazed to join vocational groups, cheerleading squads or fraternities. Scholastic groups involve a great many students, and yet, the percent of members subjected to hazing was extremely low. Oddly though, when scholastic groups do haze, they tend toward dangerous hazing activities.

A large number of students were involved in sports, music, and church groups so even a modest percent of these groups adds up to a large number of students being hazed. Only 22 percent of high school students belong to gangs, but a high percentage (73%) of gang members are hazed.

Percent of Students Involved in Specific Types of Organizations

Group	%	Group	%
Sports Team	67	Cheerleading Squad	15
Music, Art, Theater group	39	Newspaper or Yearbook	12
Scholastic/Intellectual Club	30	Political or Social Action	10
Church Group	29	Vocational Group	8
Social Club or Org.	25	Fraternity or Sorority	6
Peer Group or Gang	22		

The organizations that hazed the greatest percentage of their members were fraternities, sororities, peer groups, and gangs. More than one-third of the new players for sports and cheerleading were hazed. Vocational and church groups hazed about a quarter of their new members.

Percent of Students Hazed to Join Specific Organizations

Group	%	Group	%
Fraternity or Sorority	76	Music, Art, Theater group	22
Peer Group or Gang	73	Political or Social Action	21
Sports Team	35	Social Club or Org.	21
Cheerleading Squad	34	Newspaper or Yearbook	17
Vocational Group	27	Scholastic/Intellectual Club	12
Church Group	24		

WHO IS MOST AT RISK OF BEING HAZED?

All students involved in high school organizations are at risk of being subjected to hazing. No high school group was completely free of hazing.

Adults' experiences and attitudes greatly influence students' involvement in hazing. Students who knew an adult who was hazed were more likely to be hazed. In the teen-age years, being accepted is the central developmental task. This drive for conformity creates fertile ground for hazing, so that even minor adult encouragement of this behavior can be more powerful than adults realize because it plays upon teen-agers' incredibly strong drive to belong.

Students' attitudes reflect their likelihood of being hazed. Students who said they considered hazing socially acceptable were significantly more frequently involved in all forms of hazing. Not surprisingly, students who thought humiliating hazing was good were more often subjected to humiliation; students who thought dangerous hazing was good were more apt to engage in dangerous hazing.

Students with a lower grade point average (GPA) were significantly more likely to be involved with all forms of hazing than those with a higher GPA.

For many students, hazing starts young. Six percent of all students responding to the survey indicated they were hazed before they were teen-agers. One quarter of the students who reported being hazed in high school (24.3%) said they were hazed before they were teen-agers.

Age Students Were First Hazed

Age	%
≤ 9	10%
10 – 12	15%
13 – 15	61%
16 – 18	15%

For many students hazing becomes a way of life more than a rite of passage. As found in the research on hazing in collegiate athletics (Alfred University, 1999, p. 8), 42 percent of the athletes hazed in college were also hazed in high school and 5 percent said they were hazed in middle school. Comparing high school athletes to college athletes shows the level of dangerous hazing persists at about the same levels (23% in high school, 21% in college), whereas substance abuse and humiliation increase substantially in college (from 22% to 51% and from 45% to 65% respectively).

Percent of Athletes Subjected to Hazing, High School cf. College

Initiation Rites	High School	College
Humiliating hazing	45%	65%
Substance Abuse	22%	51%
Dangerous hazing	23%	21%

Boys were subjected to more hazing behaviors than girls and were significantly more involved in dangerous hazing. Among boys, 48 percent were subjected to humiliating hazing; 24 percent said they were involved in substance abuse; and 27 percent participated in dangerous hazing. Still, girls were consistently involved in all forms of hazing at very high levels: humiliating hazing 39 percent; substance abuse 18 percent; and dangerous hazing 17 percent.

Every high school organization, except newspaper and yearbook staffs, had significantly high levels of hazing.

- Sports, gangs, music, art, and theater groups were significantly high in every form of hazing.
- Church groups were significantly high in all forms, but particularly dangerous hazing.
- Cheerleading and vocational groups were significantly high in humiliation and substance abuse.
- Fraternities and sororities were significantly high in all three categories of hazing behaviors.
- Social groups were significantly high in humiliating and dangerous hazing.
- Political groups were significantly high in substance abuse.
- Scholastic groups were significantly high in dangerous hazing.

An unanticipated finding was that nearly half of the students hazed for church groups were expected to engage in illegal activities.

Students Significantly More Likely to Experience Various Forms of Hazing[2]

	Humiliating Hazing	Substance Abuse Hazing	Dangerous Hazing
Grade Point Ave:	Lower	Lower	Lower
Gender:			Male
Believe:	Humiliation is good		Danger is good
Know adult who was hazed:	Yes	Yes	Yes
Think hazing is socially acceptable:	Yes	Yes	Yes
Were hazed for:	Sport	Peer group or gang	Peer group or gang
	Peer group or gang	Sport	Sport
	Music, art, theater	Cheerleading squad	Church group
	Cheerleading squad	Music, art, theater	Music, art, theater
	Church group	Vocational group	Fraternity/sorority
	Fraternity/sorority	Fraternity/sorority	Social organization
	Social organization	Political group	Scholastic group
	Vocational group	Church group	

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[2] Highly significant on a logistic regression X^2 at <0.01. Groups are listed in order of significance.

WHAT ARE THE CONSEQUENCES OF HAZING?

Nearly three-quarters of the high school students who reported they were hazed said they had one or more negative consequences.

Percent of Students Hazed Who Suffered Negative Consequences

Consequences	%	Consequences	%
Got into a fight	24	Committed a crime	16
Was injured	23	Considered suicide	15
Fought with my parents	22	Got sick	12
Did poorly on school work	21	Quit going out with friends	11
Missed school, practice, game, meeting	19	Got in trouble with police	10
Hurt someone else	20	Was convicted of a crime	4
Had difficulty eating, sleeping, concentrating	18	**One or more negative consequence**	**71**

Twelve percent (n=32) reported "other" consequences, including:

- ***Negative consequences***: was depressed, cried all the time, was completely miserable, fought with my family, was uncomfortable, was tormented throughout high school, "was made fun of—but who cares?", suffered low self-esteem, was insulted, had an emotional break down, or sustained internal bruising (41%).
- ***Positive consequences***: gained valuable life experiences, matured, really woke up, or experienced joy/elation/satisfaction, natural high, found it challenging, had fun (31%).
- ***Relief***: was relieved or glad to know others had done it too (29%).

Among the students who reported being hazed, their feelings were split between negative and positive. Many reported both. Thirteen percent wanted revenge, but reported few other feelings.

Students' Feelings about Being Hazed

Negative Feelings	%	Positive Feelings	%
Angry	35	Part of the group	43
Embarrassed	28	Proud	30
Confused	25	Strong	27
Guilty	23	Trusted	18
Regretful	21	**Total**	**59**
Sad	20	**Other Feelings**	
Total	**59**	Wanted revenge	13

Categories of Feelings	%
Negative Feelings	27
Both Negative and Positive Feelings	32
Positive Feelings	27
Revenge	13

Seventeen percent marked "other" feelings (n=44). Interestingly, the respondents divided evenly among the three categories:

- ***Negative feelings***: felt hurt, betrayed ("those people were supposed to be my friends"), used, lonely ("I was lonely and would have done anything. That's stupid."), unintelligent, dirty, dishonored, worthless, degrated (sic), hatred, afraid or "guilty after I returned my meanness."
- ***Positive feelings***: had fun, was excited, happy, real, alive, felt good about myself, cool, confident, strong, and like a family.
- ***Neutral feelings***: normal, relieved, glad it was over, or indifferent.

One student said, "It was fun, but I was angry because there's no choice."

Students who thought hazing was a problem felt isolated from adults. Forty percent of the students said they wouldn't report hazing. When asked why they would not report hazing, 36 percent replied: "There's no one to tell. Who could I tell?" Twenty-seven percent said "Adults would not know how to handle it" and 28 percent said, "It's not a problem. Sometimes accidents happen." Peer pressure seemed less of a factor in not reporting hazing. Twenty-four percent said "Other kids would make my life miserable," and 16 percent said "I just wouldn't tell on my friends, no matter what."

Percent of Students Who Would Not Report Hazing and Why Not

Student Reporting of Hazing	**%**
Would you report hazing? No ➔	40
If not, why not? (mark all that apply)	
There's no one to tell. Who could I tell?	36
It's not a problem. Sometimes accidents happen.	28
Adults wouldn't know how to handle it right.	27
Other kids would make my life miserable.	24
I just wouldn't tell on my friends no matter what.	16

WHY DO THEY DO IT?

Most students reported participating in hazing because it was "fun and exciting." Most of these students, however, were involved in only humiliating, rather than dangerous hazing (X^2, $p<0.001$). The reasons for participating clustered into three groups:

- It was fun and exciting. We felt closer as a group. I got to prove myself.
- I just went along with it. I was scared to say no. I didn't know what was happening.
- I wanted revenge.

Reasons for Participating in Hazing

Reason Given	%
It was fun and exciting	48
We felt closer as a group	44
I got to prove myself	34
I just went along with it	34
I was scared to say no	16
I wanted revenge	12
I didn't know what was happening	9
Adults do it too	9

Twenty percent reported "other" reasons for participating (n=57). These were quite varied:

- ***Personal choice or status***: wanted attention; wanted to be in the "cool group;" wanted to show rank; I didn't want to be alone; I was told the girls do it too; gave me self confidence; it's funny, humorous or fun; there's nothing wrong; it's just kids having fun (33%).
- ***Tradition, not a problem***: everybody goes through it; not dangerous or harmful; wasn't a huge issue; just messing around; it was never harmful, it wasn't too bad; ours was positive; some of it was good hazing; it is a rite of passage; or it's tradition (33%).
- ***Pressure***: I had to; was forced to; required for my position; price of initiation; adults made me feel there was no choice; I got out; I quit the team; or I stood against it (20%).
- ***Get out aggression***: desire to engage in various forms of fighting or drunken aggression (7%).
- ***Immaturity***: "I was immature and uneducated; " and "This was about 6 years ago - I've changed." (two students).

One student said, "Public humiliation helps us to keep from becoming too proud."

Student comments on the surveys ranged from supporting hazing, to supporting free choice, to protesting hazing.

- "Hazing is a part of life; those who are not strong and complain are not good to be your 'friends.'"
- "This survey is a waste of time and I don't know what it's for but it isn't pertaining to high school students - send it to college students."
- "This was the dummest (sic) survey I've ever taken."
- "If you're dumb enough to want it, that's your choice."
- "I personally haven't experienced any form of hazing - now that I am informed of this I strongly disagree with it!"

Still, nearly all students felt that hazing was wrong: 98 percent thought dangerous hazing was wrong, 86 percent thought humiliating hazing was wrong, and 43 percent assumed it was illegal.

At the same time, about a third of the students felt that hazing was socially acceptable (35%) or knew an adult who was hazed (31%).

Students did not know if hazing was illegal in their state. Nearly half of the student (44%) reported that they did not know if hazing was legal or illegal in their state. Another 43 percent thought it was illegal, and 13 percent thought it was legal. Their assumptions, however, were totally unrelated to whether or not there was a law in their state. Of the 13 percent who thought hazing was legal, 82 percent lived in a state with an anti-hazing law and 18 percent lived in a state without an anti-hazing law. Among those who thought hazing was illegal (43%), 86 percent lived in a state with an anti-hazing law, and 14 percent lived in a state with no anti-hazing law. The only states without an anti-hazing law are Alabama, Arkansas, Colorado, Hawaii, Michigan, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, and South Dakota.

Having a hazing law in place doesn't stop it from happening. Having an anti-hazing law made no significant difference in the level of high school hazing behavior. Among college athletes, however, there were significantly higher rates of hazing in states with no anti-hazing law (Alfred University, 1999).

Students' Response to "Is Hazing Legal?" by Percent of Each Living in a State With and Without an Anti-Hazing Law

Is Hazing Legal in Your State?	%		% Lived in State With Law	% Lived in State Without Law
Yes	13	of which	82	18
No	43	of which	86	14
Don't Know	44	of which	87	14

How Do We Stop Hazing?

Most students believe that adults needed to intervene to stop it. Students rated strong, disciplinary measures for known hazing incidents (61%) and police investigation and prosecution of hazing cases (50%) as the best prevention strategies. In addition, students felt that positive bonding (43%), educational activities (37%), and challenging activities (30%) would help to prevent hazing.

How Would Students Prevent Hazing?

Prevention Strategy	%
Strong discipline for hazing	61
Police investigation & prosecution of hazing	50
Positive, bonding activities	43
Education about positive initiation and hazing	37
Adults who support positive initiation activities	34
Physically challenging activities	30
Adults who say hazing is not acceptable	27
Good behavior required to join the group	29
A "no hazing" agreement would be signed by students	23
Other	10

Asked for "other" prevention strategies, students responded (n=139):

- ***Only drastic changes in culture can prevent it.*** Over a quarter referred to hazing as an integral part of tradition and culture and therefore extremely difficult to prevent. Students said it would take a "breakdown of tradition" to stop it. One student said there is "no way (to prevent hazing) without drastically changing our culture." (27%)
- ***Commitment to civility, community, and equality***: School officials must say it's not acceptable and stress equality, self-respect, and respect for others. There need to be good role models, parenting, and early learning, with support and rewards for good behavior and those students who speak out against hazing. Students need to improve their self-esteem, grow up, learn to be mature, talk about it with other students, and put peer pressure out against it. Several students made statements such as: "The people who do it have to want to stop. Otherwise it will continue." "Only those involved can change these things." And "Make kids understand that they do have a choice, that it's okay to refuse to go along with it." (25%).
- ***Increased awareness***: Students suggested more information on hazing, including the harm it can cause, be provided through classes. They also mentioned making students aware of previous hazing accidents, "something similar to the mock car crashes they do for drunk driving." As one student put it, "Tell the gory stories - they hit the heart harder!!" Many of these students said parent need to be informed about all initiations, as well as school policy on hazing issues. Parents should be asked to help prevent it. One student noted that written, signed agreements don't help. "They have to be real." A few students noted the dangers of publicizing incidents, suggesting, "the less people that know, the less will think it's cool," and "Don't make a big deal about it over TV." (10%).

- ***Intentionally designed activities***: Students suggested mentally challenging activities; more programs for teens; things to do around town; positive extracurricular activities; and spiritual or church involvement (10%).
- ***Strict rules with enforcement***: Students recommended expulsion, jail time, or generally "harsh punishment." Others suggested making illegal; terminating the group if it is caught hazing; adopting a zero-tolerance policy; removing students from a group if they are hazing others; implementing alcohol/drug testing for some groups; rewarding students for "turning in" those who haze; implementing strict rules to belong to a club or social group; having schools adopt a safe-school act; increasing adult supervision; and "making people look stupid for hazing." (10%).
- ***Don't prevent it***: These students thought it is the student's choice: "I don't think it's wrong as long as the person is willing and it's out of good intentions." Students suggested making hazing an option and supervising it. Others said, "There's nothing wrong with it; it's fun." One student said, "It was done to us, now it's their turn." (8%).
- One student said, "Less encouragement for sexual hazing."

RECOMMENDATIONS

To prevent hazing, we need to send a clear anti-hazing message.

- Organize community opportunities (PTO, town meetings, or state legislature) to discuss hazing
- Adopt anti-hazing laws and written policies
- Educate administration, group leaders, families, and students on hazing and its consequences
- Provide information about the dangers of hazing in loss of civility as well as loss of life
- Discuss in detail among diverse groups what hazing is and is not and why
- Make student behavior part of each group leader's evaluation
- Develop a contract for students and their parents to sign regarding hazing
- Require behavioral as well as academic performance to continue on extra-curricular groups
- Establish a record of taking strong disciplinary action in cases of hazing
- Immediately notify families and law enforcement of any suspected hazing incident
- Take hazing seriously; discuss it everywhere —school, sports, bands, choirs, church groups

To keep kids safe, we need to reinvent community and cultivate community elders.

- Dramatically change our culture to value and invest in community, equality, and civility
- Train high school group leaders in community building initiation activities
- Put our selves, as adults, personally into relationships with young people
- Recognize successful adult and youth leaders for community building and service
- Provide opportunities for supervised play, so young people can practice making decisions
- Expect children to be conscious of others, and continually ask, "How does that affect others?"
- Discuss what is right and wrong and why with young people and expect to learn from them
- Share the reasoning behind decisions with professionals, group leaders, students, and families
- Support parenting education for parents to help their children develop decision-making skills
- Develop community service experiences for teens
- Expect each high school group to provide initiation rites that are meaningful and challenging: recreational times, get-to-know-you games, trips, community service, role modeling opportunities, performances, and discussion groups
- Develop special programs for young men

To keep the community safe, we need to learn to pay attention to teens who are excluded.

- Encourage kids to not keep secrets; there should always be some adult to talk to or to tell
- Ensure that there are easy ways to report hazing, without having to go public
- Be sensitive to the trauma that hazing can cause
- Pay special attention to students who are not participating , who are excluded, or who express a desire for revenge

DISCUSSION

Initiation rites are activities expected of someone in order to be treated as a full member of a group. Many groups, from executive boards to tribal societies, have recognized the need to initiate new members. An initiation activity may involve learning the history and principles of the group, engaging in recreational, team-building or community-building games, or overcoming some physical challenge that requires skill or maturity. Adult elders typically guide initiation rites toward specific goals using specific means gleaned from years of experience, insight, and wisdom. Initiates, however, do not know what is happening to them or what it means; their knowledge and comprehension comes gradually.

Our culture, however, has relatively few opportunities for youth to participate in adult-guided initiations or rites of passage and subsequently few opportunities for adults to learn to structure meaningful initiations for youth. As a result of the 1999 study, a group of university coaches was asked to offer their athletes two positive, team-building activities. They found it more difficult than they anticipated. One commented, "We agreed to do two initiation activities for each team. We wondered if we would have enough time (to do those activities in addition to practices), but we were not prepared for how hard it would be to create meaningful, engaging, effective initiations. No wonder kids get into trouble when they try (to devise initiation activities). It's really hard." To create successful community-building activities appears to be simple, but they require competence, practice and experience.

Adolescents blindly strive to be accepted and are often willing "to do anything" in order to belong, including binge drinking, sexual assault, and other forms of hazing. If society does not provide initiation, adolescents will attempt to do it on their own, often to the detriment of everyone involved, as well as the group as a whole.

Without the wisdom of experience, young people use humiliation, abuse, and endangerment to produce a story, a secret, a heightened common experience that creates the sense of bonding that they seek. Yet hazing is more destructive to human relationships than constructive, because it relies on substance abuse and other behaviors that are self-destructive, socially offensive, isolating, uncooperative, aggressive, hurtful, or disruptive at the expense of civility, integrity, respect, responsibility, cooperation, and compassion. The social, as well as personal, price of hazing outweighs the results—unnecessarily so. We can learn to bond and challenge each other in socially and personally constructive ways.

Many people ask, "But isn't some hazing good? Kids will be kids, isn't some of this just horsing around? Doesn't hazing help people from becoming too proud?" Some of it may be, however, more often than not (56%) of those subjected to humiliating hazing were also expected to engage in substance abuse, potentially illegal, or other dangerous acts. Humiliating hazing behaviors are a clear warning flag that more serious hazing behaviors may be involved.

Hazing is hazing, regardless of one's willingness to participate. Expecting someone to do something in order to be accepted by a group is different from engaging in that behavior of one's own choice. For example, being told what, when, and where to get a tattoo is different than deciding on one's own to get a tattoo. The urge to belong and prove one's self is so strong among adolescents, that they will submit to unreasonable and even illegal demands imposed by others.

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Based on the findings of this study, several areas of concern arose:

1. **Students often felt adults condone hazing.** Students are significantly more apt to be involved in hazing activities if they knew an adult who had been hazed, and they felt hazing was socially acceptable, an attitude they most likely acquire from the adults with whom they interact. Students' reasons for participating in hazing included thinking, "Adults made me feel there was no choice." Students often said they would not report hazing because "There was no one to tell" or "Adults won't know how to handle it." Students' perceptions, accurate or not, of adults' attitudes greatly influence their behavior. It is still our responsibility as a community to keep our high school youth safe. We need to send them clear messages—hazing is not safe, acceptable, or necessary. We also need to provide leadership, offer examples of how we respond to events going on around them, and pay attention to the world that young people find themselves in.

2. **Students often do not see hazing as a problem**. Only half of the students involved in substance abuse and illegal acts as part of being accepted into a group perceived their activities as hazing. Although many students who were hazed reported negative consequences of hazing (71%) and negative feelings (73%), 60 percent also reported positive feelings. The second most common reason students would not report hazing is the "It's not a problem; sometimes accidents happen." Students are not aware of anti-hazing laws. Encouraging, however, is the fact 98 percent believe that dangerous hazing was not good and 86 percent think that humiliating hazing was not good. This suggests that education about hazing and the danger involved might be effective.

3. **Religious institutions face high levels of hazing themselves**. The level of hazing for church groups was surprising. Not only did a quarter of the students belonging to church groups report involvement in hazing behaviors, they were more apt to be involved with dangerous hazing activities than students in other groups, except gangs, fraternities, and cheerleaders. At the same time they were involved in more positive initiation activities as well. This is troubling, since our strategies to prevent hazing are to provide alternative, positive initiation and strong messages about the dangers of humiliation, substance abuse, and violence. Much more research into the reasons for and dynamics of hazing in church groups in the United States is needed.

4. **Students often see hazing as "fun and exciting."** The primary reason students gave for engaging in hazing was that is was "fun and exciting." America is obsessed with fun. Being fun is a primary justification for doing just about anything. Fun equates with being worth it. A huge entertainment industry markets violence directly to our youth as being "fun." *The Christian Science Monitor* (July 21, 2000) reported that the $8.9 billion video game industry has now surpassed the movie industry in terms of domestic revenue. They note: "A study that appeared in the April issue of *The Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* found that violent video game play is related to aggressive behavior and delinquency. It also suggested that the games may be more harmful to adolescents than either violent TV shows or movies, because players identify with the aggressor, actively participate in the violence, and become seemingly addicted to the games." Hazing, particularly dangerous hazing, includes aggressive behaviors. As a society we invest billions of dollars in selling pain-free experiences of violence to youth under the label of "fun." Our youth gain a highly cultivated repertoire of violence in the process.

5. **Hazing begins young and can continue throughout life.** Many students are exposed to hazing at a young age. Six percent of all students responding and a quarter of the students

who perceived that they were hazed in high school (24.3%) indicated they were hazed before they were teen-agers. Nearly half reported being subjected to some form of hazing activities in high school and nearly a third reported being subjected to potentially illegal hazing activities in high school. Although humiliation and substance abuse increase dramatically from high school to college athletes, dangerous hazing is well established before college: 22 percent of all high school students reported involvement in these behaviors as opposed to 21 percent of college athletes. This basic level of dangerous hazing meets with significantly elevated levels of substance abuse hazing in college and a deadly combination is created.

6. **Adults working with youth should keep in mind that hazing experiences go with the student throughout life**. Over half of the students in any organized high school group have probably experienced hazing for some group in their life (50-72%) and a third or more have been expected to commit potentially illegal acts in order to be part of a group (30-50%). These experience shape students' attitudes and expectations about groups.

METHODOLOGY

The study was based on a two-page survey instrument sent to high school students around the United States. Commercial lists of high school students nationally were identified. A composite list of more than eight million names and home addresses from among approximately 15 million high school students in the country was used to draw a random national sample of 20,000, stratified by juniors and seniors. In April 2000, surveys were mailed to 20,000 students at their home addresses. A follow-up, first-class postcard to 5,000 students for whom we still maintained access to their names was mailed one-week after the survey mailing encouraged students to respond. The mailing lists were destroyed following this one-time use for research purposes only. The post office returned as undeliverable 5.46 percent of the original surveys. We therefore assumed that at most 18,600 arrived at their destination. We received in the mail 1,541 completed, useable surveys. The sample, therefore, reflects an 8.28 percent response rate.

Survey Instrument

One survey instrument was developed for high school students. A cover letter announced the survey, provided enough information about the survey to constitute informed consent, and stated the due date for the survey's return. A postage-paid return envelope was enclosed. The instrument covered the following areas:

Background: Sex, race, state of residence, location (urban, suburban, rural), grade in school, school type (public, private, home), and membership in any type of group.

Definition and Experience with Hazing: Students were asked, for each type of group, if they: were hazed to join, didn't join because they were afraid of hazing, or left the group because of it. Students were asked at what age they were first hazed, if ever; if they would report hazing; and what they thought were the most effective strategies for preventing hazing.

Initiation Activities: Finally, the survey asked what activities were expected of them to join a high school group or team. Four categories of initiation behaviors were used from last year's study of NCAA athletes: community building, humiliating, substance abuse, and endangering. The first group of behaviors had the most changes since we'd learned the most about it from last year's survey. The last groups of behaviors remained fairly stable with a few items edited and a few items added. The final behavior list had 36 behaviors as opposed to 27 behaviors on the 1999 survey form.

Open-ended Questions: Students were consistently asked for their input on such items as: other prevention strategies, reasons for participation, experiences as a consequence, feelings afterwards, and activities expected of them.

New items developed for this survey were categories of high school groups, motivational factors, consequences of hazing,

Respondents

Most of the students who responded attended public school (90%), whereas five percent attended church schools, five percent attended other private schools, and one percent was home schooled. All geographic types were represented: 46 percent suburban, 30 percent rural and 25 percent urban, as measured on a self-perception scale. Successful students were disproportionally

represented in the sample: 84 percent reported average grades of A or B, 14 percent C, and one percent D or F.

Synthetic Estimation of the Population

The sample of respondents was regionally proportional to the Federal Current Population Survey data for sixteen and seventeen year olds in the United States in September 1999. The response from mid-western students was slightly higher than to be expected. The other regions are in proportion when the mid-west is discounted.

Region	Sample		National
	%	n	%
Northeast	16.5	253	18.87
Midwest	31.0	474	23.67
South	32.5	497	34.15
West	17.9	274	23.31

In terms of gender, the sample had a much higher response rate from females than from males.

Gender	Sample		National
	%	n	%
Female	68.4	1054	48.7
Male	31.6	487	51.3

Eighty (80.1) percent of the sample was white compared to the national estimate of 78.3 percent. Since the Current Population Survey does not record Hispanic, we are not able to directly compare all the ethic origin responses to the current national statistics. Our sample roughly approximates the national distribution as seen below.

Ethic Origin	Sample		National
	%	n	%
White	80.1	1144	78.3
Hispanic	7.0	100	
Black	6.9	99	16.1
Asian	3.0	43	4.4
Other	2.4	34	
Native Am	.6	8	1.2

Findings are therefore reported based on the sample weighted by gender and region to best approximate anticipated national percentages as closely as possible given these data. For weighting, the high school student population was estimated by taking the federal Current Population Survey data for sixteen and seventeen year-olds in September 1999 and multiplying by 71 percent, the federal estimate of school participation. To estimate the entire high school-aged population, the entire number of fourteen and fifteen year-olds was added to that amount. The entire high school-aged population was therefore estimated at 13,628,460.

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Based on the survey, 91 percent of the students joined high school groups and of those 48.4 percent were subjected to some form of hazing. Based on this finding, an estimated six million high school students in the United States were subjected to hazing in the past four years, or more than one and a half million students per year. Given the limitations of this study, more studies are needed to verify and refine this estimate.

There were approximately 8,096,967 16 and 17 year olds in the United States in September 1999. The U.S. Department of Education (http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2000/digest99/chapter2.html) estimates that 71 percent of 17-year-olds are enrolled in high school. Discounting by 71 percent, we estimated 5,748,847 juniors and seniors in high schools nationally.

Estimated Distribution of Juniors and Seniors in High School in the U.S.

	Northeast	Mid-west	South	West	Total %
Male	556832	701130	1007727	687851	51.33
Female	527976	664796	955505	652205	48.67
Total %	18.87	23.67	34.15	23.31	100

Number of Juniors and Seniors in the Survey Sample

	Northeast	Mid-west	South	West	Total %
Male	74	159	140	97	31.6
Female	175	315	353	176	68.4
Total %	16.5	31	32.5	17.9	100

Stratifying the sample by gender and region, we divided the estimated national population by the number respondents in the sample to weight the sample for national synthetic estimation. The sample was taken from juniors and seniors in high school. It was thought that given the content of the survey, it would be better to address it to older students rather than the younger students and that they could reflect on their entire high school experience.

Data Collection and Handling

Surveys were mailed directly to students' home addresses. Surveys were returned to Alfred University in self-addressed, stamped business reply envelopes. Returns were due postmarked no later than May 15, 2000. One week after the deadline, on May 27, 2000, all surveys were boxed and mailed to National Computer Systems, Inc (NCS) for optical scanning. To ensure anonymity, no unique identifier was printed on the survey. Qualitative responses were compiled by hand. The final database including all respondents was transferred to a secure server at Alfred University.

Statistical Analyses

Initially, frequency tables were analyzed for each respondent group of students and staff by the entire group and by each demographic variable. A cross-tab of gender and geographic region was used to develop sample weights. Each of the six groups of males and females by region were weighted by the sample frequency divided by the population to produce synthetic estimations of

prevalence and to produce percentages expected for the population based on this currently limited set of knowledge.

Factor analyses were run to test our theoretical categories of community-building, humiliating, substance abuse, and dangerous initiations. These categories were confirmed by the factor analyses. A few behaviors were better understood by these analyses:

- "Tattoo, pierce, or shave" is more about isolation than about being hurtful to self.
- "Deprive oneself of food, sleep, or cleanliness" clusters with substance abuse behaviors, which are about being hurtful to self rather than about being humiliating, although for face validity we left this variable in the humiliating hazing category.
- "Drink or exercise until you pass out" clusters with substance abuse behaviors, which are about being hurtful to self rather than being destructive or disruptive.

To further investigate significant differences among groups, cross-tabular analyses using chi-square statistics were conducted. Demographic groups were crossed with activities to identify at-risk groups and hot spots, while the perceived hazing variables were crossed with variables to validate perceived versus actual hazing. Group variables were crossed with demographic variables to identify group differences. Gender was crossed with all variables to identify male and female differences.

Limitations of the Study

Because of the secrecy surrounding hazing activities, we guaranteed complete anonymity by conducting a direct-mail survey. High school students have a consistently low rate of response on mail surveys. The low response rate begs for further studies to confirm or refute, and further refine these findings. The sample size was large enough, however, to use inferential statistical analyses with high levels of confidence (95-99%).